

**Linda Clair**  
**Meditation Retreat**  
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**Transcription from Audio Recordings**

**File 5C – Wednesday afternoon discussion**

Question: Is surrendered the same as humble?

Linda: Sort of, yes. Surrender is more acceptance, I'd say. Humble is when there is less and less of you there. There's not so much this ego fighting to be someone, to know better, to know more, to know anything. That's how I'd define it anyway.

Question: Though in your practice you would surrender to the unknown, but still have some effort?

Linda: Well, it takes quite a bit of effort to surrender. Surrender sounds like it's this very passive action, and it is an *action*, it is a passive action, but not passive in the way that people use the term passive. Often passive is used as quite a negative term, whereas in this, I quite like the term passive action. It does take a lot of effort to let go of things, to let go, just come back to your body. I don't use the word surrender much because it's a little bit...

Question: Loaded?

Linda: Well, every word is loaded really. As you go more into this the definition of words changes. Like I say, good and bad – good is not as opposed to bad, it's just, "It's good." But it doesn't mean there's necessarily a bad. I think to come to something like this and do this for seven days with a teacher is being humble. Doesn't mean you're always agreeing with what I advise or say but you're here, you've put yourself in this position.

When I was growing up, when I was an adult, I always thought I could do it better by myself, I didn't need so much advice. I was quite arrogant in that way, and I suppose most people are to a degree. But then when I met my teacher it all changed overnight really.

Question: I thought at one stage that nobody could help me either with my problems, there was nobody I could turn to for advice, there was nobody sage like you or anybody around. And I thought, "Who can I turn to? What can I do?" And then this little voice said, "The answers are inside you," and I didn't know what that meant. But it means this doesn't it?

Linda: Yes.

Question: Today's been very full on – a lot of strong thoughts and feelings coming up. It's really good to be here, and the first few days were very peaceful compared to the last few months, which have been very intense. And it feels like it's starting – I'm having a lot of flash backs and strong feelings, and processing things that have happened the last few months.

Linda: With the bushfire thing?

Question: Yes, my father died in October, and then straight on the back of that was the bushfires. And then lot of things happening in Canberra – I live between Canberra and Quaama (both areas affected severely by the fires). So it's just multiple layers of things that I feel I haven't had time to process. I knew I had to come to this retreat no matter what. Corona virus wasn't going to stop me. It's starting to bubble up, and I'm trying to come back to the body.

Something happened yesterday. I had a look at my phone in the afternoon and there were a couple of messages about Corona virus and I had a little read, skimmed through, and I just went into this feeling of panic, I think, like terror. There's this tension in the solar plexus and I thought it was about my mother and thinking about trying to protect people that I love, going into all these scenarios. I came down into this sit and it was going over and over in my mind and this voice came – it was my voice – and it said, "I am going to die." And it said it so strongly and clearly, and everything just melted, the panic dropped away, my body dropped away, everything dropped away except now, except presence. It was like the answer to all of the fears of the last months, they were gone in feeling deeply, "That's okay, I am going to die." And I'd never taken that on board before. It was amazing. I kept saying it to myself occasionally when thoughts would start coming back, I'd say it again and feel it again.

Then I was walking outside in the evening break and looking at the world, nature. Everything made sense; it was like everything clicked into place. But in a way I hadn't been able to see when I was somehow pretending I wasn't going to die, and things weren't going to change, and we can save this, and oh, poor that. And all this sentimentality and stories that come around avoiding the fact that you're going to die. And the evening sit was really beautiful and still. Then this morning the thoughts are churning like crazy again, and if I say that to myself I can go back to that stillness, but I know that's a kind of manipulation now, so I'm just wondering what to do.

Linda: That's true. I'd say just come back to down here, come back to your body. But don't try to necessarily come back to stillness because you can use stillness as an avoidance of dealing with what's coming up and simply feeling it. And if you can be as stable as possible – and it's why I keep talking about grounding, grounding, grounding – you can cope with that stuff coming up. And emotions and past, they're all flashbacks that need to come up, that you couldn't handle at the time. It was just too much, and you were busy just surviving in a way. But now the residual stuff is coming up and you need to allow it to come up. But if you can be grounded with it at the same time you won't get too much at one time.

And it's true, the only thing we know is my body is going to die one day. We don't know when but it is going to be now, and that's why there is such a deep fear of being here now, because that's the only thing that's certain.

Question: It's such a relief though; it feels like such a relief.

Linda: It is. And then you start to see how much of your behaviour is based on trying to avoid that fact. All these interests that we have and passion are often just an avoidance of that fact, a way of distracting ourselves, rather than getting down to the blunt truth: I'm going to die one day. So things like the bushfire, parents dying, people close to us dying, really brings home that fact. And it doesn't need to be morbid. It's a huge relief to realise. What's the worst thing that could happen? Most people would say "I could die," or they might say, "Someone close to me could die," but really they're scared of their own death.

So just keep it steady, stable, keep coming back to your breath. Try not to be too overwhelmed with what's coming up. It doesn't mean if there's a flashback you need to concentrate on it – you see it, come back to your body – just the same practice as usual. So use those strong images or thoughts as a way of breaking free from them and coming back. And when they're that strong they're very clear, so do that.

Question: So I'm trying to feel it more than think it, and leave the story.

Linda: Yes, feel it, don't get into the thinking about it. It's not going to do anything making a story about it. It just means you're going to get more deeply into thinking about it. So it's not a repression; it can seem like that but you see it and you just don't go with it. You see it, acknowledge it's there, come back to your body. It's a tricky thing to do, especially when there's one thought or image that's very strong and gets you emotional. But the more emotional you become with it the more it will keep coming up to get you to think about it and be emotional with it. So it's great that it's coming up and you've got the space now to just be with it.

Question: The September retreat I had a lot of that, I had grief, like this lump in my chest that I couldn't explain. It was like watching this intense feeling, and still being able to be watching the belly at the same time. I think that was knowing that my father was dying – it was like doing it in advance in a way. And it was an amazing, intense thing to practice, feeling that intensity here and still and having a silence going on at the same time.

Linda: So did that help when your father died?

Question: Yes. It has helped a lot over the last few months.

Linda: So don't get into the trap of focusing on stillness and trying to hold it. Because if you start to hold that stillness it becomes a false sort of stillness where you're using it as a way to avoid other stuff coming up, disturbance. Disturbance is not bad. We often feel, "I feel really disturbed, that's bad, I just want to feel settled." But in this practice you need, at times, to be disturbed. It needs to come up and the disturbance is challenging and it challenges you. And that goes on forever. It's not like, whatever state you're in, you never become disturbed. The disturbances become much less but you can still become disturbed. But rather than seeing it as something negative or bad, it's like a challenge – "Okay, it's something else I need to see in me." Because, like you said, it's all in you, everything you want is in you. So be careful you don't blame that disturbance on something – it's triggered by something, basically your fear of death. It's often triggered by an outside situation, something that's happening in your life, but it's not the *cause*. If you see it there is no cause, there is no effect in truth, but we live our lives with this cause effect thing, blaming this, blaming that. "This is happening because of that," rather than just, "This is happening now."

So really use these next few days, and you might feel disturbed, you might not. At times you'll probably feel really still – and I'm not saying don't feel still, don't enjoy that – but if you feel you're holding on to that stillness and the intention is to try and avoid something, let it go.

Question: These last couple of days I've been looking at that dynamic where fear creates thinking and thinking creates more fear, that circular thing. And also, how much my thinking mind is running around propping up this persona, this ego creation that is C., and I know that that's what needed to

go. I realised that my greatest fear, that I was aware of, wasn't the death of my body but the death of the ego, which this little mind has been running around trying to patch up every time it gets hurt, or to avoid it being hurt, all of those things. The fear was stopping me really surrendering into my body and that spaciousness that is there sometimes, which is just the sensations and something more.

It was because I was terrified of not having something that was "me" because I had no idea what "me" would mean if I surrendered that ego structure. So the death of me was the psychic death of me not the physical death of me. Then, beautifully, once I'd seen that and decided I would trust the process I had some beautiful sittings this morning. Now I don't believe I am that creation. I've doubted it for a long time but now it's done its time. But I'm not stable of course in that other place, as in a lot of pain this last sitting and a lot of tiredness, but some beautiful time in between. But that seems to have been the fear of death that's been most real for me, rather than the mortality of the body – that hasn't seemed to be the fear that I have, or that I've experienced most deeply.

Linda: As long as there is that strong ego though we do believe to an extent that this is who I am – this body is who I am. So it's true, it's really the fear of the death of "me". But until you *realise* that, your own mortality, really deeply realise that, there's still this belief that I am this body. It might not appear that, and you're probably feeling, "No, no, I don't," but it is there. So it's why it is so good to use the body; it's why it's so much about the body and the body is so valuable. And it's actually why we're here in this body – to realise that. The ego is so firmly entwined, so closely entwined with the body, with this identity of the body, that it's very hard to separate the two.

Question: I'm not sure what you're saying in that because what happened for me is that when I was able to trust the body, even for a while let go or accept that that *person* wasn't me, then I could trust being in my body in a way that I hadn't been able to trust completely before. It feels quite separate to bodily death because I have had the threat of that. But I don't feel fear of being dead. But it seems to me the body and the ego seem more separate than as you're describing them.

Linda: I'd say they're still pretty closely entwined. You're seeing it more closely – this is just what I feel. But as long as there is ego there, there is some attachment to the body.

Question: But the body doesn't grip me in the same way as that ego mind. Doesn't matter, it's all a story. There was something that was feeling different for me.

Linda: Good.

Question: I want to clarify around what I've been doing this retreat. In my sittings I've been trying to really be here, in a way that feels different than previously. So I think rather than trying to go for a really long sit and waiting for the pain – and I'm kind of off till it hits, and then when it happens I'm struggling around mentally – I've just been feeling into this moment more. You talk about not focusing or using stillness as an escape. So I'm really trying to ground into the breath, the present moment of the breath. And I'm not close to other things so I'm using sounds and my whole body, almost everything that's available to me through my senses. I don't know if I'm being too rigid with it, because of the focusing – I'm with the breath and then as soon as thinking's there I do see it and acknowledge it and come back. But I'm not sure where that line is, if it's being too rigid and focus-y and suppressing or whatever?

Linda: There is no line really, and that's the difficult part with this. You can't say. You feel like you should be doing it perfectly and if you're not you're doing something wrong. But as I keep saying there is no perfection. That perceived line keeps changing and moving so there is no one fixed line, and you just need to go with the situation and with what's happening, and that's continually changing. So not resisting it when something does come up. Not going, "Oh no, I should be feeling like this," or, "I should be still," or, "I should feel this." You let that go and just use your bodily intelligence.

So from what you said and the way you said it it sounds great, it sounds really good, so don't worry that you're not doing it the right way or whatever. Just be as much in your body and your breath as you can be. And the breath is something that is very close to now, your body is too. It's not totally but it is, as I keep saying, the closest thing you've got to reality in this existence, and the breath is the primary sensation. If you don't breathe you die. So really get as close to the breath as you can. But if you do feel like you're focusing on it a bit much, if you're excluding things, just open up a bit and hear the sounds, feel different things. But on the other hand, at times it can feel like that's all there is – just that breathing. Not even the breath, just breathing. You're feeling it going in and out, and that's an amazing feeling when that happens. And then it changes again. So, don't worry too much about that line because there's not really any line.

Question: I just wanted to share something I came up with following from the conversation we all had yesterday. I now sit like it is my last sit, so that goes to the intention. I stopped worrying about what the result of the practice is going to be, because it's my last sit. It helped me immensely, I don't worry about the time, I don't worry about the effort, but I want to put effort in because it's my last sit.

Linda: Good intention: "Okay, this is it, I could be dead in half an hour."

Question: Yes, that's the recipe I arrived at yesterday. I don't know if I will continue with it.

Linda: That's really good. And for me, that's why I became so desperate in my practice because I knew I had limited time. I realised I couldn't assume – well, I *knew* I didn't have forever – but I couldn't assume that my teacher was always going to be there, the situation was always going to be like that. So while I had the opportunity I grabbed it, and treated it a bit like that.

Question: I think in the context of the conversations we've had about the fear of dying, so it's more savouring because it may be my last sit, so I can go deeper and I don't get attached to, "Is it good, bad?" I don't care because whatever it is it's my last sit.

Question: I find I get to a point where I have no idea what I'm doing and I'm just trying to trust the process. Another thing that came up for me is trust in you as well, and that it is a process.

Linda: So, yes, if you don't know what you're doing that's a really good thing, because you *don't* know what you're doing, that's the thing! You really don't.

Question: It's like a leap of faith, over a chasm, not sure if there's another side – trusting what you're saying.

Linda: You do need to trust to a degree. I don't say believe what I'm saying because that's a different thing – I say something and you believe it. I might give you advice and then you test that in your own experience and something interesting happens. Maybe not what you thought might happen but something does change and that gives you a bit more trust in me, in what I'm saying and this whole practice.

So of course it's not me personally but it's this, this practice. So the trust is a big thing because there are lots of times where you've got no idea why you're doing this, what you're doing, especially in the middle of a retreat. Afterwards it usually becomes a bit clearer and you do notice things that are happening, maybe for months after a retreat. And then that also gives you a deeper trust in the whole thing because you do see that something is happening. And it's not just a surface thing it's something very deep that's changing within you.

Question: Well, I'm happy as a clown doing it. Even though it's hell, there's another part of me that's really happy. It is a strange process.

Linda: It is sort of strange, but in the end it all makes complete sense. You see it so clearly when the mind is not involved. When you become free of that suddenly you see everything so clearly it's quite incredible.

Question: I'm feeling mentally exhausted and it's probably the retreat where I've really given my all, like put in a lot more effort. I feel I really arrived, and I feel my head is buzzing and congested. And in fact I'm leaving tonight and secretly feeling a bit relieved. Is there something I'm doing wrong or is that normal?

Linda: No, that's quite normal – the buzzing, the denseness in your head, the pressure – it's all quite normal. Just be careful driving home.

Question: I was also fantasising about if we all stayed here, not just to escape the virus, but say we were able and willing to stay here for the rest of our lives, would we become enlightened sooner? (Lots of laughter.) Or are there benefits to going back home and living... I'm curious. Is it about the intensity and the amount of time? Like we're all said we're here because we want enlightenment, so is it about the time and the intensity? Or what are the benefits of going back home, if there are any?

Linda: Well, when you're in this situation all the time, after a while it would just become normal – it would still affect you. But you go into a monastery or an ashram and people just take it for granted after a while. Whereas when you're in a situation like this and you know it's a limited time, you put a lot into it. And then when you go back into your daily life it's like you're processing it and you're allowing your body to absorb what's happened during the retreat. And as I keep saying, you don't realise until afterwards what's happened. And you notice your progress usually in day-to-day things, in things that have changed, habits that fall away, your relationships with people change. So it's a good way to see the effects of the retreat but if you were here all the time you'd probably start to take it for granted. All this other stuff would start happening – politics and all that crap. We don't really want to get in to that.

Question: So normal life would come back here?

Linda: I think it's good doing both. You appreciate this. Practice in normal life – have your sitting practice – but it also makes you a bit more independent, rather than totally depending on this situation. While you're here, yes, lap it up, make as much effort as you can. But I also feel it makes you more balanced if you can have the two. You do this and you go back into your daily life and apply this in your daily life. So it does make you more balanced and independent in the end. I know I never wanted to live in a monastery all the time. It was effective for a while, I didn't enjoy it, but it was very effective for a short time. But there was no way I wanted to stay there forever.

Question: So how do you make the most of the challenges of your daily life?

Linda: Just see everything as a challenge. Keep looking at you, your reactions to things. Know that how you feel is your responsibility. That's what this practice starts to do – rather than automatically, "I feel this because of that or because of them," look at, "Whatever I feel is in me and I'm responsible for it."

And sit, have a regular practice. Keep that up too.

Question: Whenever I come back from a retreat I'm more energised so I sit for longer, and I get up earlier, and after a while the clock goes back another fifteen minutes.

Linda: So also do the thing of having short sits during the day. Have the main sit but then have shorter sits, two or three, during the day just to break the momentum of the day. If you can with work do that, just set aside ten minutes, fifteen minutes, and just sit. Don't do anything else, just sit, and that will break the momentum.

Question: Yes, I have tried that and I found it was a huge effort to let go of what I was doing. Like I always feel I'm on a roll and letting go to just think about nothing feels a momentous endeavour. But I think in a way it's the one that pays the most because when I've been doing it I feel really different.

Linda: It will really reset things and it will make you more efficient. There is probably a fear that you're going to lose your momentum of work if you stop, but what it will do is refresh you, and you might see things in a completely different way. So you might have an issue or a problem – you stop, you look at it again and you might see it completely differently. So don't be scared to stop.

Question: Yes, I thought of it as laziness but it's probably fear of losing my train of thought.

(Talk of sourcing food for the retreat due to panic buying at beginning of Corona virus, and Linda's – very funny – suggestions of what we might eat instead. Then talk about sniffles and protocols.)